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NOTES OF TRAVEL IN THE OLD WORLD.

Written for the National Intelligencer by a Citizen of Washington.

LETTERS FROM JERUSALEM.—BAALBEK.

December, 1851.

Before leaving Baalbek I went to the Greek convent to have a social chat with the patriarch, who was represented to be a very hospitable and intelligent man. It is situated down toward the lower part of the town, not far from the Temple of Santa Barbara. The entrance is through a dilapidated court-yard, which serves as a sort of caravanserai for camels and mules; and the convent is little better than the rest of the hovels around it, except that it is larger and higher. There is a church attached to it of an ancient and ruinous appearance, with a few tawdry ornaments and miserable pictures in the interior. A Greek monk, who acted as our cicerone, told us that this church contained the most valuable relic of any church in Syria; that it was not commonly exhibited to strangers, but he would take the liberty of showing it to our excellencies. Having thus excited our curiosity, he proceeded, with great caution and solemnity, to draw back some small black curtains that covered a hole in the wall, and by degrees revealed to us the hole, which was cased around with a black frame and covered with a pane of glass; but I candidly confess I could see nothing in it, nor could I, after the most persevering inquiries all round, ascertain that any body else had seen any thing, or that there was any thing there to be seen. It was a good deal like some of the wonderful things one is called upon to admire now and then in Italy—you go a great way to see them, and are expected to be in raptures, but for your life you can't find out what all the talk is about; there is nothing to be seen. We paid a piastre, however, for the information, and I would recommend all travellers who go to Baalbek to do likewise; they may see something, probably a bone of the ass that Baalam rode, or a reflected image of the face, with its full complement of ears.

The reception room of the convent was furnished in the Turkish fashion, with a low platform extending round the walls on three sides, upon which were spread rugs of every variety of color. There were no chairs, nor any other furniture except a few bad prints, and a good supply of chibouks hung up around the walls. It was a great nuisance to be obliged to take off our shoes, as on all occasions, no matter how many houses we went into, how dirty they were, or how cold it was, whether there were rugs on the ground, or mats, or, what was most common, puddles of mud, our dragoman protested that if we kept on our shoes it would be a mortal offence to the inmates of the house. I was often disposed to rebel against this insane practice; but you know when one is in Rome he must be romantic; when one is in Syria he must bear with serious inconveniences, not the least of which is keeping up a good understanding with the natives by keeping your feet bare.

The bishop, a venerable man, with a beard of patriarchal length, received us with great kindness and cordiality. He said it was seldom he had the pleasure of meeting American travellers there, and regretted that we had not taken up our quarters in the convent. While we were talking coffee and chibouks were brought in by a domestic, and gracefully presented to us in the oriental style. As it is characteristic of the East, I may as well tell you the manner in which one is honored on paying a visit. You enter the room, furnished as above stated, with rugs all round, make your bow, and are politely motioned to a seat; that is, to a seat on the floor. If you can do it, you squat down as much like a tailor as possible; if you can't, you stretch out both legs and get your back against the wall. Do let me persuade you to try it, if you want to know how odd it feels. The form of salutation depends pretty much on the relative rank of each party. Where there is much ceremony it is merely a bow and the hand is placed over the breast; where the civility is intended to be very marked, as in the native form, the visiter makes a dive at the hem of the host's garment as if he would catch it up and kiss it; but the host, perceiving the intended honor, dives down at the same moment to prevent it, and as if by accident catches the hand of his guest and helps him up with it part of the way; when each touches his breast, mouth, and forehead with his own hand; sometimes repeating the dive, but this is only when a man is electioneering for some office, or calls to borrow a few hundred piastres, in which case he dives down a great many times.

Supposing you to be seated now, a servant enters, bearing a tray, upon which are several cups of coffee about the size of egg-cups, and these are handed round and presented with a graceful bow to each visiter. The coffee is as thick as chocolate, and at first may lodge in your throat, but after a while one learns to like it. Chibouks are then brought. The stems are about six feet in length, and the bowl being placed on the ground in a little brass pan at the proper distance, the mouthpiece is whirled around dexterously by the domestic, who calculates the distance so nicely that he brings it within the sixteenth of an inch of its destination. The smoking begins, and if you have good Djebel or Latakia tobacco, it is, as my friend the English captain says, quite stunning. Conversation goes on between the whiffs, and is as lively as such conversation can be where one naturally thinks in English, communicates his ideas to his dragoman in Italian or French, has them translated into Turkish, Arabic, or Greek, and learns the result in about ten minutes from the time of starting. I often, after a good deal of difficulty, got out a joke and made my interpreter understand the full bearings of it; when he would set to work, jabbering in some horrible unknown tongue, taking so long to tell it that the whole thing would quite escape my memory, and it was only in about a quarter of an hour after that an explosion of laughter would startle me out of my cloud of smoke; for a joke is never so stale or so trifling as not to cause a laugh in the East. As I made it a point, however, never to talk French or Italian to Yusef where there was a probability of these languages being understood, (by which means I passed for rather a learned man,) he translated from English in the present case. The worthy patriarch felt a good deal interested in the fact, usually announced by Yusef in terms of great pomposity, that I had travelled a long way and had been in California. The old gentleman had heard some fabulous accounts of California, and, after some exclamations of wonder at seeing before him a live person from that strange land, he delivered himself as follows: "It is a wonderful country, I know; thousands of miles off; away at the other side of London. They dig up whole mountains of gold there, and catch fish without eyes. God Almighty kills them because they are wicked; also food is scarce. The sun is very hot; there is great thirst; likewise men burrow holes in the ground the same as rats. Oh, I don't want to go to California. It is a bad country. Better stay here in Baalbek and praise God." I thought so too, and desired Yusef to tell his reverence that it would be better for him not to go to California, if he had any notion that way; in fact, that he would do much better reclaiming benighted Arabs in Baalbek than digging for gold on the banks of the Sacramento, and would find a more fertile harvest in his own professional line.

We had further conversation on various topics; after which, with many kind wishes, the patriarch bid us goodby, and wished us a pleasant tour through Syria; expressing at the same time his regret that we had not found it convenient to come at once to the convent instead of going to a native house.

I went down again during the forenoon to the ruins and made a sketch of the Temple of the Sun and a general view of the whole of Baalbek. Near the main ruin is a very beautiful little temple, which I omitted to mention before, built chiefly of marble and very highly decorated. It reminded me a good deal of the Temple of the Winds at Athens. The form is octagonal, and there is a portico all round, supported by eight Corinthian columns, between which in the niches are the remains of pedestals upon which formerly stood statues. The Greek priests suppose this to be the tower of Santa Barbara. By some travellers it is compared to the Temple of Janus at Rome. Two little streams of water run through the town, one of which passes under this temple.

One of the most remarkable ruins in Baalbek is that of the ancient mosque, in which is seen the tomb of Saladin. I had some doubts as to this being the ruin of a mosque; but, in the absence of any better information than that of our dragoman, had to take it as such. There is a high wall, enclosing a space of some hundreds of yards square, in which are rows of vast arches sustained by pillars, covering the entire interior. Looking through underneath it has the appearance of a perfect forest of pillars. Near the entrance is a little tomb built of rough stone, apparently of Saracenic construction, upon one end of which is an inscription in Arabic. This is said to be the tomb of the famous Saladin, the conqueror of the Christian hosts on the fields of Hatin and of Esdraelon. I did not read the inscription; so I am unable to tell you what it means.

There are some few objects of interest in the way of ruined walls and arches, containing patches of the antique, scattered about through the town and the neighborhood, all of which we thoroughly examined; but they are so much like any other ruins that the interest depends mainly upon their being in Baalbek, where every body cannot go to see them, as in Rome or Athens.

Tired of rambling about, I sat down on an eminence overlooking the ruins, and began to think seriously and soberly of all that I had seen, and to divest myself of the first enthusiastic impressions, so as to arrive at some reasonable idea of what Baalbek must have been in the days of its glory. Sober second thought is a good deal like a written contract; it brings both parties (the imagination and the judgment) to a proper understanding, and leaves no room for visionary speculation or loose interpretation.

That Baalbek was a city abounding in fine edifices is sufficiently apparent from the magnificence of its ruins. One cannot but deplore the desolation of those splendid temples, and the loss of the many works of art buried there, among which must have been some of the choicest of ancient times; and while there is so much left to admire it is not improbable that, in the lapse of centuries, there may have been much destroyed equally worthy of admiration. But that Baalbek ever was a very extensive or very important city is not, I think, rendered probable by any evidence now existing. The foundations of the ancient walls, which can be clearly traced, embrace but a small area of ground, certainly not sufficient for a very large city; and its position, shut in among the mountains of Lebanon, two days distant from any seaport, and not on the usually travelled route from the interior cities of Asia Minor, indicates that it was not supported by commerce. It is also probable that the Temple of the Sun and the Palace were the most important of all the public edifices; and that the streets were narrow and badly paved, without side walks, as in all the cities of the East, and the residences of ordinary construction; because even a small city could not be embraced in so limited a space with any thing like fine streets or large houses. If the implements of agriculture were not a good deal better than any that exist in Syria at the present day, (and it is said they are about the same as were used in scriptural times,) the plain of Bukaa must have been more indebted to Nature than to the cultivation of man for its reputed fertility. Probably there were more trees on it, and some gardens and vineyards for the supply of the town. The inhabitants must have lived on something, and it is not likely they had much else to eat except what they produced on this plain. But there is no evidence of a luxurious style of living. If ever there were carriages, they must have travelled in the air, with mules or horses at each end, as they do now; for there is nothing to show that there were roads fit for wheeled vehicles to run on. Sometimes a piece of an old Roman road is seen along the coast, and poor enough it must have been in its best day; but I could discover nothing of the kind about Baalbek. I think the inhabitants of the glorious City of the Sun rode on donkeys. At all events, donkeys must have been convenient in climbing through the streets, unless the style of paving was a good deal better than any thing done throughout the East in modern times, of which there is no evidence in the specimens that remain.

In sober truth, the more I thought about Baalbek as it was, the more I became impressed with the idea that we are apt to magnify the grandeur of every thing ancient, and encourage false impressions by feeding the mind with the poetry of the past. There was as much reality then as there is at present; men were human and all their works were human; and the ruins of those works derive much of their effect from the lapse of time. To an imaginative mind a broken column is more beautiful covered with the mould of ages, than one of precisely the same form new and complete. There must have been a time when those works were new, and when contemporary architects and critics held the same opinion of them, compared with something more antique, as we do now of what is done in our day, compared with what was done then. The enchantment that distance lends is lent to all these temples and relics of ancient grandeur with a most liberal hand. I saw in Jerusalem a picture of Baalbek rebuilt as it originally stood, beautifully drawn by a competent artist; and, comparing it with drawings of the ruins, I must say that Baalbek in ruins, with a little room for the imagination, is much grander and more imposing than Baalbek, complete as it existed in ages past, with nothing beyond mere reality to look to.

But it will not do to indulge in this train of thought. Strip the past of all its romance, and there is little left to write about. What reader will be satisfied with plain facts; what reader will be satisfied with the simple unadorned truth—except the few that I hope to honor me with a perusal of these pages; and it is only to that rare but enlightened class that I dare to address such unpopular views.

In my rambles about the village of Baalbek I was struck with the beauty of the children, and the extreme youthfulness of some of the Arab mothers. I saw several young females, not more than twelve or fourteen years of age, with babies in their arms, evidently their own; and I was told that this is quite common throughout Syria. Many of the women are very beautiful—much more so I think than either the Circassian or the Turkish women. It was quite enchanting their fine complexions, dark eyebrows, and flashing eyes; and for regularity and delicacy of features I have seldom seen them equalled, except in other parts of Syria. In Nazareth I saw some of the best formed and most beautiful women I had ever seen in any country; I believe it is noted as much for the beauty of its female population among tourists as for its historical interest; but at no place did I see what I really thought approached the perfection of beauty in so high a degree as in Bethlehem. The women of Bethlehem are absolutely bewitching. I never saw such perfect profiles, such eyes and eyebrows, and such delicate little hands and feet. Not that I mean to say that they are at all to be compared in all the higher attributes of beauty to our own fair countrywomen, for that would be sacrilege. There is nothing in the East, or in Europe either, or any where else that I have ever visited, to compare with the ladies of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. Talk of Parisian beauties! Lively and vivacious they are, to be sure; but not dignified, not queenly, not gentle and modest. Talk of English beauties! Grand enough, fair, but not graceful, and stiff as buckram. Italian beauties; dark, dull, and greasy. German, fat and florid; Turkish, tallowy and buttery; all well enough in their way; but, Mashalla! it won't do to mention them in the same breath with American beauties.

And now goodbye to Baalbek. We are off for Damascus, galloping out through the ruins and over the prostrate relics of the past as merrily as if they were only so much rubbish.

Yours, truly, J. R. B.

SYRIA—DAMASCUS.

December, 1851.

About noon we left the ruins of Baalbek behind us, and proceeded through the plain of Bakaa towards Damascus. Our road lay along the base of Anti-Lebanon. The aspect of the whole country was sterile and desolate in the extreme. There was not a shrub on the wayside to relieve the utter barrenness of the scene, or intercept the dazzling glare of the sun, which seen now in midwinter had something left of its summer fierceness. The weather was not warm, but the whitish cast of the earth and the unclouded brilliancy of the sky gave that intensity of light so characteristic of Syria, and which is so destructive to the sight that nearly half the inhabitants are afflicted with opthalmia. Not far from the outer walls of Baalbek we saw the quarries from which the stone for the Temple of the Sun and all the public edifices was taken. Large gaps in the form of an amphitheatre are cut in the solid rock, from which the immense blocks of stone in the Castle were taken. The ground or bottom of the quarries is covered with detached blocks, cut away, trimmed, and ready for transportation. It is a strange sight to see these pieces there, just as they were left in ages past, fresh from the hands of the masons. One block of stone is of immense length. It is said to be larger and longer than any found in the ruins of Baalbek. I think our dragoman said the length was sixty-seven feet. The Arabs have another legend connected with this stone, rather harder to credit than the story of the column. They say that the Sultan, when he was building the castle of Baalbek, found all the men in his kindom unable to remove this stone, so great was its weight. A woman, standing near, and seeing all their efforts unavailing, said: "Upon my soul! a nice set of fellows you are not to be able to carry a little stone!" "Little!" quoth they; "do you call this little?" "To be sure I do," said the woman; "a mere nothing. If you were men you could carry it." "Hear her!" said they. "Why one would think you could carry it yourself, the way you talk." "Carry it! Of course I can," said she; whereupon she laid hold of the stone, lifted it up on her back, and trotted all the way with it to Baalbek, where she laid it down by the castle wall. "Now," said she to the Sultan, who was superintending the work, "give me ten thousand piastres for carrying this stone here." "May I be kicked like a dog if I do," said the Sultan, in a rage. "What! have all my men disgraced, and then pay a slave of a woman for doing it! Get thee away, wretch!" "Oh ho!" said the woman; "is that the way you talk?" Whereupon she seized the Sultan by the back of the neck and pitched him headlong into a neighboring ditch, giving him a kick as he went. "By my soul!" quoth she, "men are forgetting their place nowadays. They are getting as impertinent and conceited as popinjays." With that she seized hold of the stone again, tumbled it over on her back, and trotted all the way back with it to the quarry, where the workmen were still looking at one another in silent astonishment. "There," said the woman, pitching the stone down; "I told you so! You had better go now and help the Sultan out of the ditch. He's floundering about there like a mud-turtle." Saying which, she slapped the chief workman heels over head, because he was staring at her, and went off dancing the Raas, since which time the stone has remained just as she left it. The Arabs pointed it out to us, and said there was no doubt about the truth of the story, for the stone was in the very same spot. That they believed every word of it themselves was quite evident; and we, of course, believed as much as we could.

Passing some ancient tombs on the left, we descended into a rocky valley, called Wady Ain Tihebeh, or the valley of the well. Here there were some camels feeding near by the fountain. They had come over from Damascus with packs of merchandise for Baalbek; and so picturesque they looked, all lying down in a circle, with their masters sitting on the ruined fountain smoking, that I fain had to stop and make a sketch of them. Soon after, we came to the village of Tihebeh, a miserable collection of huts, with the white dome of a mosque in the centre. About this point we struck off to the left from the plain of Bakaa, and shortly came to the valley of Nebusheet; from which we climbed up a very rocky path, hardly practicable for our horses, to the village of Nebusheet. In this village there is a mosque containing a large tomb, called by the inhabitants the Tomb of the Prophet Nebusheet. There are none others but the followers of Nubusheet live in the village, and they are known as Meitmaleh. They reverence the tomb of their prophet as the Mahometans do at Mecca; but it is only in secret or among themselves that they dare to avow their belief. When among the Turks they pray like Turks, and profess to acknowledge the superior power of Mahomet; but they are looked upon generally as heretics, and are not admitted to all the privileges of the Mahometan faith. For instance, they cannot go to Mecca, or enter the Mosque of Omar at Jerusalem. In the valley beyond Nebusheet there is a rapid stream of good water, from which the village is supplied. The labor required to carry the water up the rocky path, a distance of nearly a mile, must be prodigious. The Arab men know very well that it is harder work than smoking the chibouk; so they attend to the smoking and make the women and children carry the water. We met in the pass some thirty or forty women and children, with scarce any thing but rags on them, bearing great earthen pitchers on their heads; and yet they toiled up the rocks singing merrily, as if theirs was as happy a life as any, and perhaps it was. About the same number were going down; being thus continually engaged in the hardest possible labor, while the men were sitting up in the village, smoking or doing nothing. I thought that in warm weather it must keep half the population of Nebusheet thirsty to keep the other half supplied with water. The stream below is called the river of Surgoya; and is a pretty strong stream for its size, driving several mills. At one of these mills we stopped to lunch. The hoppers were going at a great rate, and I peeped in to see how the grinding was done. The miller wore a turban, and had so much dust in his beard that he looked like an old Pasha. "Marhabba," said he, which means how d'ye do, or good morning, or something of the kind; "Marhabba," said I, and I crept in through the low doorway. Now, I had seen some few mills in my time, but never such a mill as this. The whole machinery consisted of a hopper of rough stone, with a hole through it, in which was wedged a round shaft of wood. At the bottom of the shaft were some paddles, against which the water dashed at one side, turning the shaft, and with the shaft the hopper. A bag of wheat was hung over the hopper, to which was fastened a piece of stick that ran over the stone, and by its vibration jerked out the wheat. The miller, seeing my wonder, thought it arose from inability on my part to understand the complexity of this machinery; and with great good nature he explained the whole process in Arabic, pointing with much satisfaction at each part, and showing me by a whirling motion of the arm that it was the going round of the hopper that ground the wheat. This idea of the wonderful manner in which the wheat was reduced to meal had such a hold upon his imagination that he jumped on the hopper to stop it, in order that I might see for myself. But the stone would'nt stop immediately, and it was only after being tilted on his back once or twice that the worthy miller succeeded in getting himself braced against a post so as to stop the mill. Then he took up a handful of the meal, and showed me that it was really ground by that same hopper, which he made still clearer to my mind by a copious dissertation in Arabic on grist-mills as a general thing. "Tahib!" said he, signifying "good." "Tahib," said I, and crept out through the same hole that I entered, very much pleased with my visit.

On leaving the mill, we passed through a long winding valley, hemmed in on the right and left by low monotonous hills, dotted over with oak bushes, and uninhabited for many miles, save by a few goat-herds. We were so disgusted with the monotony of this valley that we forgot to ask the name. Ascending and descending through several passes, we at length entered another valley, through which runs a stream that waters the valley of Zebdene. Yusef had gone on to the village to look out for lodgings; and my two friends and myself, tired of lagging behind with the mules, pushed on for Zebdene, in hopes of reaching it before dark. Crossing the stream in half an hour or so, we ascended a hill on the other side, and here we found two roads going nearly in the same direction and of nearly equal size. We took the upper one, which of course was the wrong one. By the time we had ridden a mile it was quite dark, and we found from the lights in another direction that we had made a mistake. There being no other path, we had to retrace our steps, which is not pleasant in Syria, where every step is a matter of study for both horse and rider, and stepping in the dark especially. We returned again to the valley, from which we heard the muleteers coming down the side of the mountain, shouting loudly to the jaded animals. They reached us presently, and we all pushed on together for Zebdene. It was one of the most pleasant rides we had enjoyed during our tour. The moon came out, as we ascended the banks of the stream, and it became a mild, clear night, with the towering mountains in full view all around us, and the snow-capt heights of Djebel esh Sheik glimmering in the distance. The sharp cry of a jackall from the ravine on the other side of the stream had a wild and startling effect in the stillness of the night; and the strange stories of Eleas and the muleteers about robberies and murders in these lonesome glens made us involuntarily look towards every thicket on the roadside. It was not an agreeable idea, take it altogether, that of having our legs cut off, as was done with one traveller, or our skulls battered in with clubs, as another was served not long before, or even to be politely requested to give up our money, and compelled to make the rest of our tour on charity. Yusef had taken with him all the guns, pistols, and swords—and, worse than that, all the propensity for fighting that was in the party. We might have fought, but I believe we preferred not fighting. For my part, I had made up my mind, if attacked by the robbers, to offer them my old coat, two shirts, a tooth-brush, a small pocket comb, some sketches of Baalbek, and a few short-hand notes from which these letters are written, together with a draft on my friend the Southerner, who was kindly paying my way to Alexandria, where I expected a remittance. I had likewise about me some small paper money, amounting to twenty kreutzers, (sixteen cents,) payable in Austria in the course of forty or fifty years; a letter of introduction to the Pasha of Egypt, two Seidlitz powders, and a pocket-compass, which, together with an expired commission as third lieutenant in the revenue service, I intended delivering to the chief of the robbers sooner than shed one drop of blood, and requesting him as a favor to take any thing else about my person or in my knapsack that he might find useful. Fortunately, however, for your readers and myself, we met no robbers, or, if we did, they were so terribly afraid of us that they passed on without shooting.

We soon came into the beautiful and fertile neighborhood of Zebdene. Signs of civilization, such as we had not seen since leaving Beirut, began to appear on both sides of the road. Every thing quite reminded us of home. The road was broad and plain, and the gardens were well hedged with bushes. Rustic gateways, covered with running roses, peeped out from clumps of trees; the gurgling of springs and the soft echo of distant voices made a pleasant music in the night air; and as we rode along under the shade of overhanging trees, and looked through the vistas of foilage on each side, the running vines hanging in festoons through the vineyards, and the groves of fig trees and olives were lit up with a glow of moonlight, and vividly brought to mind our first impressions of the beauties of Eden. As we entered the village, it was a pleasant variety to find none of that shadowless and parched appearance about it that characterized all the villages we had seen before. The houses were half hidden among trees, with little green patches of ground about them, and though rudely constructed of mud and stone, like all we had seen, yet they were evidently larger and more commodious. We rode some distance looking around us for Yusef, starting up sleepy dogs, and exciting the wonder of the natives in our search, calling Yusef, Yusef! as we went, but it was not until we had reached the furthest extremity of the village that Yusef made his appearance. Alas, I grieve to tell it! his face was very red and he staggered a good deal, and labored under some difficulty in getting out his words; in short, it was quite plain he had been drinking arrack—a thing that he did a little too often for our satisfaction. "Come dis way genelmen," said he, "I'm got you a very good house. My niece live here—she gone down to Damascus now, but her husband very good man." Here was another of Yusef's nieces; I was not sorry to hear that she was gone to Damascus; for somehow Yusef always wanted to delay us when his nieces were at home. The house was very nice and comfortable—one of the best we had seen in our travels; it was situated in an enclosure, fenced in by high hedges, with a rustic gateway in front covered with rose bushes, and had altogether a rural and picturesque effect in the moonlight. The Arabs sitting about the door smoking their chibouk, and the mules standing under the bushes with their packs, while the muleteers ran about shouting at a great rate and doing a great deal of work that amounted to nothing, were all that reminded us that we were in a foreign land. Without them we might readily have fancied that we were in a quiet little country village at home.

The husband of Yusef's niece received us with great kindness and hospitality. A good fire was blazing in the corner, near which he spread mats for us, and while we were enjoying the cheerful glow of the fire, he brought us coffee and pipes. Here let me tell you that you who take your ease at home, don't know the luxury of coffee and tobacco. Syria in the month of December is the place to find it out. You get up in the morning, after suffering all the tortures vermin can inflict during the night, eat a hasty breakfast, and are off before sunrise. For six hours you climb scraggy mountains and descend horrible precipices, and then sit down on a rock by the road side or near some ruined Khan, to eat a chicken and some leather bread; then the same riding is repeated till night, when you feel as if a piece of horse or a well-cooked dog would be a positive luxury. While you are warming yourself by the cheerful blaze of the fire, hot coffee appears as if by magic—the very thing to brace up the system for dinner, which comes in about an hour. Now, blessed be the man that invented coffee! It goes down with such a relish after all the troubles of the day; warming the throat, sending a thrill of delight into the stomach, filling body and soul with joy, and inspiring a proper appreciation of the chibouk and Djebel tobacco. All these delights we enjoyed at Zebdene, and very grateful and happy we felt that night in spite of the prejudices of the untravelled against the use of stimulants. I shall long look back upon Zebdene as a bright spot in our pilgrimage through Syria. In the month of May it must be one of the most charming places imaginable.

Having a spare hour next morning, while the mules were being loaded, we walked out to see the village by daylight, and were quite enchanted with the fresh and verdant hedges of wild rose, the rustic gateways, (which seemed to be the ruling passion of the Zebdenes,) the pomp of groves, the garniture of fields, and "all that the genial ray of morning gilds." On our return to the house the horses and mules were ready, and we rode off merrily towards Damascus. Clouds began to gather upon the mountains, as we passed out of the shaded avenues of the village into the open plain, and it was not long before a heavy rain swept down upon us, accompanied by a strong cold wind that was very piercing. Three hours from Zebdene we came to the river Berada, another small stream, running between high and precipitous rocks of very marked geological character. Parts of the mountain sides were distorted as if by violent convulsions of nature, and we observed in the rocks distinct marks of trees and impressions of leaves. Our guide pointed out to us the place where the river formerly gushed through the mountain on the left, after we had passed a bridge; and on the right on a high peak the tomb of Abel. We had no data to authenticate the burial of Abel on this mountain, but it was the current opinion among the Greek christians that this was his tomb. On the left, beyond the bridge, we saw a number of holes cut in the rocks like doorways, in which the Jews in old times buried their dead. They are called the tombs of the Jews. Further on we came to the village of Suharadan—a dirty gathering of dilapidated hovels; and soon after, the village of El Sanean, situated on the slope of a hill. The valley on the left is well watered, and is fertile and beautifully wooded on the banks of the rivulet, having a fresh and verdant appearance, that contrasts pleasantly with the barren mountains on each side. El Sanean is made memorable to us by certain curious tombstones that we saw there, and by the vilest abuse that ever unoffending pilgrims received. An old woman, literally a living skeleton, covered with leather, followed us up all the way from the spring in the hollow, shaking her clenched hands at us and shrieking at the top of her voice, "Dogs that you are—get away from here. Begone, filth of the earth!" Seeing that we merely laughed at this, (partly for the reason that it was all in an unknown tongue, and partly because when translated it sounded so ludicrous to hear this skinny old hag denounce us as barbarians and dogs, without the slightest provocation, so much like what we were in the habit of doing towards the Arabs ourselves, and so palpable a hit at travellers in general,) the old wretch actually danced with rage, flinging about her arms and working her jaws like some galvanized mummy. Our dragoman was so overcome with laughter that it was some time before he could give us the gist of her remarks. "Oh, yes!" she shrieked, "you may laugh you dogs—you don't know any better. You are nothing but dirt, scarce fit to be spit upon! Begone from here, you grinning dogs, before I defile my hands by scratching your eyes out! What do you come poking about here for? Why don't you stay at home, where you are all dogs together. You want some bread, eh? Ha! ha! that's good!" And here the ferocious old hag laughed so horrible with her toothless jaws that we fain rode off to escape further abuse.

In an hour we came to the stream of Zeita, where we stopped to lunch. From this point on to the village of Dum-mar is a winding valley, highly fertile and picturesque, the road running along a ledge at the base of the mounain on the right, the river on the left, its banks covered with trees, and numerous springs gushing from the rocks and running over the road, making one of the most refreshing combinations of agreeable sights we had yet seen. At length we entered the village of Dum-mar, the most beautiful spot on the whole road from Baalbek to Damascus, not excepting our favorite Zebdene. We saw little of the houses, for they are nearly covered up with trees and running vines; but the gardens, wild and uncultivated as they are, teemed with richness of vegetation; and the ruinous old walls by the road side were overrun with luxuriant vines and wild flowers. As we passed out of the village near the bridge we saw a large gathering of the native Arabs, lounging and smoking their chibouks under an immense wide-spreading tree in front of a Khan, with groups of camels laden with merchandise from Damascus feeding in the shade, and at a short distance from the crowd an Arab story-teller, shouting at the top of his voice the famous history of Hassan, the Robber of Camels. The bridge crosses the river of Dum-mar, a considerable stream, watering a fertile tract of country above. Leaving the village we had a pretty hard ride up to the top of the mountain called Jebel el Nasir. It was here we had the first *view* of the magnificent plains of Haroun—a sight that can never be forgotten; one that is truly a joy forever.

In the midst of an extensive wooded valley lay the beautiful city of Damascus, called by the Emperor Julian "the true city of Jupiter, the eye of the whole East." What can I say of the first view of Damascus, the bright glowing "paradise of the Orient," the famous city of the Caliphate, that from early youth had haunted us in our brightest dreams of Eastern travel! There it lay before us at last, outspread at the base of Jebel el Nasir, upon the broad plain embosomed in groves of olives and cypress; with its mosques and minarets and castles, its white domes and giant old gateways, rising from the mass of foliage and glittering in the sunbeams like a fairy city of snow in a summer garden. It was enough to inspire even a practical fellow like myself, whose mission in the East is to rake up stern facts and expose all visionary fancies—enough I say to strike poetry into the unpoetical—even into a determined foe to romance. On this very spot, or close by, it is said that a famous Sheik, whose tomb we saw as we passed down, exclaimed on beholding Damascus: "I will proceed no further; I will die here, for if I go on I shall be unable to enjoy Paradise." And sure enough he died, for there stands his tomb. Like the first sight of Constantinople, it is gorgeously oriental; different indeed in position, but scarcely less beautiful. Surrounded by luxuriant groves, and embosomed in gardens, its white spires and domes stand out with wonderful distinctness and sumptuous profusion from amid the waving mass of green; and afar on every side from the base of Jebel el Nasir stretches the splendid valley of the Seven rivers, variegated with green fields and woods and villages; while on the one hand gleamed the bright waters of the river Burada and the Bahr el Merj, or Lake of the Meadow; and on the other the snow-capped summit of Jebel esh Sheik, the ancient Hermon; and dim ranges of mountains loomed up from the plains of Hawran, and a purple glow from the setting sun hung softly over the vast amphitheatre of mountain and valley, giving more than earthly beauty to a scene that seemed of itself the "baseless fabric of a vision." Such is the approach to Damascus, "the right-hand of the cities of Syria."

Here, before we pass beyond the Mausoleum of Abutel Nazir, the guide of the Prophet, let us take a long lingering look over the plain, and drink deep into our souls draughts of heavenly beauty; for within the walls of Damascus, as within the city of the Sultan, all is of "earth, earthy."

Descending by a narrow pass to the left of the Mausoluem of Abutel Nasir, we rode for about a mile along the base of the mountain, and then turned to the right into the groves of Damascus. Here reality at once gave a check to our enthusiasm. All travellers bound to Damascus, in search of the beautiful, should take a good look at it from the summit of Jebel el Nasir, and die as soon as possible, like the Sheik, but not go a step further. There is certainly nothing to die for within the walls of Damascus, though a good deal to produce death, in the way of filth and disease. Instead of handsome villas, surrounded by flower gardens and adorned with works of art, as we were led to expect from the view above, we saw nothing but high mud walls, broken and dilapidated gateways, and trees covered with dust; with a few breaches in the walls by the wayside, exposing some wretched huts within the enclosure, as dirty as mud and dust could make them. There was not the least attempt at ornament or comfort visible anywhere; scarce sufficient cultivation to sustain life; lazy dogs and lazier Arabs lay basking in the sun by the road side, sharing mutually the luxuries of dust and flies; and the whole aspect of the neighborhood, as we approached Damascus, was neglected and barbarous in the extreme. The narrow and mud-walled roads crossed each other in all directions; dust covering them to the depth of six inches; and the air was so filled with it that we were well nigh stifled before we entered upon the principal paved road leading into the city. At the gate called by the Franks the Porta di Baalbek, we were stopped by some Turkish guards, who entered into a social conversation with our dragoman concerning our business in Damascus, past history, and future prospects, all of which seemed to afford them the highest satisfaction, as they resumed their chibouks, upon being paid the sum of two half-piasters, or four cents and a quarter, with an evident determination to remain satisfied with the information they had received (and the half-piasters) all the rest of their lives, and never to stop smoking again on any account.

If our disappointment was great upon entering the groves in the neighborhood of Damascus, it was greater still upon entering the city. The streets are not more than eight or ten feet in width, badly paved in parts and not paved at all generally; dirty beyond description, and abounding in foul odors and disgusting sights of lepers and beggars. Overhead throughout most of the city were hung ragged mats for the purpose, I believe, of keeping out the air in summer, and making the streets wet and gloomy in winter. It was as much as our lives were worth to ride through these streets over the slippery stones; spraining our horses legs, and getting jammed on each side of the street every dozen steps, sometimes carrying away the shutters of a shop or a basket of fruit, and now and then compelled to jerk up the off leg and hug the wall to avoid being crushed by a drove of camels. The loads of these animals seemed expressly designed to rake both sides of the streets; and where there was not room for them, mules and donkeys supplied their place. We had often heard of the hostility of the inhabitants of Damascus to christians; their hatred of all sects except their own, their intolerance towards foreigners, and their bigotted attachment to Islamism; but we had been told that of late years they had greatly improved in consequence of increased intercourse with the Frank nations of Europe. Ibrahim Pasha taught them a good many lessons, without doing their religion or morals much good. The British Government, in 1841, gave them some notion of the importance of good behavior, which seemed to make some impression upon them. They still vent their hatred, however, upon foreigners, as we found from our experience, whenever they can do so without incurring risk. In passing through some of the more obscure streets we had stones thrown at us by the boys, and were repeatedly spit at by the children, and insulted by derisive shouts of Frangi! Frangi! The men stood by laughing, evidently quite pleased with the conduct of the rising generation, though it is due to them to say that they were too lazy or too cowardly to take any part in these annoyances themselves. After passing through several of the quarters in which the different sects reside, we arrived at a wall with a door in it, upon entering which we found ourselves in the Court of the *Hotel de Palmyré*, the only tolerable place for Frank travellers in the city. From the streets the houses have the appearance of mud forts, most of them being bare mud walls with holes in them, presenting a most forbidding and gloomy aspect to the stranger, who is not aware of the pleasant surprise that is in store for him when he passes the obscure little doorway. We were quite charmed upon entering the Court of the *Hotel de Palmyre*. In truth, it seemed as if we had made a mistake, and stumbled into the palace of some Pasha. It was a very ordinary house, as we afterwards found, but appeared really magnificent, after what we had been accustomed to. There were orange trees, laden with tempting fruit; a large reservoir full of water, with a fountain in the centre; a paved court and various archways, leading into the different apartments, all on the ground floor; and then there were Arab and Greek servants which were lounging about; and the host, with a flaming red fezz in his hand, receiving us as visiters of high distinction—all very gratifying things to wayworn travellers, who had been for eight days wandering about over the mountains of Lebanon. The air was fragrant with the scent of oranges and rose water—we suspected the host of having sprinkled the pavement or himself with attar of roses when he heard we were coming—fountains were bubbling away in the rooms and out of the rooms; in short, without going into particulars, the whole was quite Lalla Rookish—that is to say, like all things Oriental, the first sight was full of enchantment. It was so strange and showy, every thing so fashioned out to captivate the senses; the rooms extending clear up to the top of the house, with domes above; the walls cornered and curved into all sorts of shapes, and painted with brilliant colors, in stripes and grotesque devices; marble floors, alcoves for the beds, running gauze curtains drawn across, to keep off the spray of the fountains; divans to lounge and smoke upon, with a pleasant mingling of the useful in the way of narguillas and chibouks. Oh, you have no idea how luxurious it was! Such was the effect of these gloomy features of Eastern life upon my nervous system, aided by two cups of excellent black tea from a box presented to the host, as he solemnly declared, by milord Bath, that I lost all sense of the dignity of Oriental travel in the enthusiasm of the occasion, and gave vent to my joy in such extraordinary flourishes on the flute as to arouse every smoking Arab and son of an Arab about the establishment. They pronounced it, as I solemnly aver on the responsibility of our dragoman, the most *Tahib* music that ever was heard within the walls of Damascus, not excepting the famous dead march of the Turkish band, consisting of three notes, with variations. That beautiful air called Ezepa Kouna, by the Arabs, and so much admired by them whenever I played it, rolled magnificently round the dome of our chamber, and reverberated with ten-fold effect throughout the Court, to the great astonishment of two English gentlemen who had just returned from Palmyra, and who had probably never heard it before, or only knew it by the vulgar name of Zip Coon. My friends—the Captain and the Southerner—were quite charmed, but none so delighted as I was myself. We all declared it was a glorious life, this riding, and smoking, and fluting our way through the land of turbans, and went to bed as jolly as possible, to dream our first dream in Damascus.

What we dreamed it would be impossible to say with any degree of accuracy. If I remember right the English Captain was troubled about getting in all his coal by 2 P. M., at which hour the steamer was to sail; the Southerner slept soundly in a cane-brake; and it fell to my lot to dream that the grand Caliph of Damascus had ordered me to be bastinadoed for misrepresenting him in the report of a speech which he had just delivered in the United States Senate, on the subject of free-soil. At all events, whatever our troubles were, (and I assure you our *nightcaps* had nothing to do with them,) we all woke up next morning in a very serious frame of mind; and, upon ascertaining that we had bad colds, and our beards were dripping wet, and our heads ached, we arrived at the following conclusions: That, however charming a fountain may be in a bedroom in summer, it is apt to be damp in the month of December; that cold marble floors are more pleasant in August than in midwinter; and the total absence of chimneys, stoves, and all means of warming a room, except a miserable pot of charcoal is not productive of comfort, however pretty and Oriental the whole thing may be. All the glitter of colors on the walls looked very tawdry this morning; the fountain sent a cold shudder through us; the Arab domestics looked as lazy and filthy as ever, and in spite of the repeated assurances of my landlord that "indeed mi-lord Bath had slept in this very chamber," we changed our quarters for another room less showy but much more comfortable.

We took for our guide through the city a methodical old gentleman called Solomon. In his book of recommendations he is represented to be a "regular old Jew," "[illegible] honest a man as any body could expect," "not the brightest guide in the world, but the best in Damascus, and one who knows the way through the city;" and, in justice to him, I must say that he deserved these testimonials, and that his knowledge of the languages is equal to his knowledge of the antiquities of Damascus.

The old gentleman (for he claimed to be a Reis) was very slow and dignified in his movements, and wore a long beard and large turban, that gave him a most imposing aspect; we called him Solomon the solemn. [illegible] showed us the bazaars, and told us with great solemnity that they were bazaars; the mosques, too, he pointed out and informed us that they were mosques; some old walls likewise he showed us, and said they were walls; after which, satisfied that he had imparted to us much valuable information, he took us to a native smoking house, and with considerable permission called for coffee and narguillas for the whole party, which he paid for out of his own purse, charging us afterwards only double the amount, according to a custom prevalent among guides all over the world.

Actuated by the purest motives—chiefly by the desire to dissipate the mists of fancy, as you know has been [illegible] object all along—I took the liberty of asking Solomon [the] solemn if the ladies of Damascus were pretty; to which he replied by throwing up both hands in horror, and saying, "God forbid that I should know. People say they are, but I don't know, never saw them in my life." N[illegible] I gave Solomon credit for sincerity in a good many things; for instance, being in earnest when he smoked the narguilla, hating the Mahometans with a bitter hatred, lo[ving] the Armenians with a Jewish love, and in believing [that] there was not a more honest man in the city of Damascus; but it must be admitted that I had room for doubt on the point above stated. Strange stories are told a[bout] some of the English nobility who have visited Damascus of late; and nobody knows more about them than our friend, "except," as our maitre d'hotel was in the h[abit] of saying on all occassions, "mi-lord Bath." Here is [at] last, translated from the original Arabic: "There [was] once in the East an elegant beast, and Beckford wa[s his] name; a harem he took, and then wrote a book, w[hich] won him some little fame; but corruption was tired [of] an earl it inspired to follow in his path; when so[me] shame it put his name, then washed it in a bath. M[illegible] Because a nobleman is in Damascus he need'nt be [a Da]mascus Blade." Good bye, till my next.

Yours truly, J. R.[illegible]